

Life Stories

► BIOGRAPHY

Did you ever wish you could meet someone who inspires or intrigues you? Did you ever wonder what life was like for Martin Luther King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, or Christopher Columbus? Biographies help bring history to life by giving readers a glimpse into the public and private lives of people who helped shape our world.



—AP/Wide World Photos

introduce the genre

A **biography** is the factual and true story of someone else's life. Biography brings a person to life on the page; therefore, writers of biography must extensively research the life and times of their subject. Students can use the Internet, books, encyclopedias, newspaper and magazine articles, and personal interviews to learn more about a person and the time period in which that person lives or lived. While biography allows a writer to explore others' lives, the stories don't have to be recorded in writing. A biography can also be told in the forms of film, photography, and music.

"Biography is the only true history."

—Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), *Scottish essayist and historian*

spark creativity: story starters

Use the following activities to help students write biographies.

Ask Great Questions, Find Great Answers. Write a biography about a family member. Use these interview questions as your guide: What makes the person interesting? What qualities does the person possess? What events shaped his or her life? Help students develop interviewing skills with the reproducible **"Reporter's Notebook."**

Make a Scrapbook. Imagine that a hundred years from now, someone has to write a biography about you. Provide that person with information about your life and times. Compile a scrapbook that includes letters, pictures, souvenirs, and information about your life.

Quilt Me a Story. Before the U.S. Civil War, African slaves made quilts for families who owned plantations. After the Civil War, the former slaves made quilts for their own families, using scraps of family members' clothing and patterns and colors that were familiar to them. Ask an adult for some special mementos—a photocopy of an old letter or photograph, a wedding invitation, and so on. Glue or sew the items together to make a quilt.

WRITING TIP: Outline

Like all stories, a good biography includes a beginning, a middle, and an end. It also narrates a person's life story in chronological order. Select an event in a famous person's life that will be your focus (for example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech). Then map out in chronological order the incidents that led to that event.